

Opening Statement of the Honorable Bob Latta
Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection
Hearing on “Perspectives on Mixed Martial Arts”
November 9, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today to discuss Mixed Martial Arts, or MMA. This sport has enjoyed tremendous success since its beginnings in the 1990s. I would like to thank my colleague from Oklahoma, Mr. Mullin, for his continued work on this issue and promoting safety for fighters. I look forward to learning more about MMA and Mr. Mullin’s legislation this morning.

The history of mixed martial arts goes back to Ancient Greece, when the first Olympians in the 7th Century B.C. fought. Today’s MMA is far more regulated—all 50 States permit the sport, subject to rules governing issues like banned substances, equipment requirements, round length, weight classes, and allowing referees and physicians to halt a fight to protect the competitors.

In some ways MMA is regulated in a manner similar to boxing, however; there are differences. We look forward to learning more about how MMA operates and is regulated today.

Mixed martial arts competitions are held throughout the United States, under the banner of both professional and amateur sponsors. The Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts have been adopted by the largest organizers and regulators, including the Ultimate Fighting Championship, Bellator, and the Association of Boxing Commissions and Combative Sports. The rules include requirements for the fighting area and equipment, how fights are to be judged, the use of gloves and mouthpieces, and the prohibition of certain tactics like biting and gouging.

MMA includes both men’s and women’s divisions, and in both cases the champions of the sport have become internationally known celebrities. Nothing illustrates this point more clearly than the recent boxing match between MMA champion Conor McGregor and boxer Floyd Mayweather Jr., which reportedly drew hundreds of millions of viewers around the globe, including a near record number of pay-per-view purchases and nearly 27 million social media interactions.

MMA has gone through many changes in its comparatively short time as a high profile American sport. At the hearing today, we will receive testimony about how the sport is regulated, how competitors and promoters are compensated, and what it takes to compete at a high level. We will hear about what State regulators are doing to ensure fighter safety, and learn more about how it has come to be one of America's fastest growing sports.

I thank our witnesses for joining us today, and we look forward to your testimony.